'Casino' is shallow and disappointing

By DOLORES A. BARCLAY
AP Arts Editor

A Martin Scorsese movie always is highly anticipated because he remains one of the most intelligent, inventive and compelling filmmakers of today. Why, then, is his latest, "Casino," such a disappointment?

Movie Review

With Scorsese at the helm, a cast headed by Robert De Niro, a mob-Las Vegas theme and writing by Nicholas Pileggi, it should be a winner. Instead, it's a bloated, shallow, meandering celebration of violence with only the thinnest of plots.

"Casino" opens with a bang. Literally. Sam "Ace" Rothstein (De Niro), who has grown from bookie to casino entrepreneur, leaves his house, gets into his car and, BANG. The car blows up and Ace goes flying.

The explosion sets the stage for a crash course in 1970s Las Vegas. Vegas, Ace says in a voiceover, is like "a morality earwash — Las Vegas does for us what Lourdes does for humpbacks and cripples." But by the end of the decade, Vegas begins to change: the mob paradise for gamblers and hustlers is slowly becoming a "Disneyland" of sorts — a vacation spot for families.

Ace, who can fix the odds on just about anything, is chosen by Midwestern mob bosses to front a casino operation in Las Vegas. He quickly makes a bundle for the mob and becomes something of a kingpin on the desert strip, a man of principle who isn't easily swayed.

Meanwhile, his old pal from the streets, Nicky Santoro (Joe Pesci), arrives in Vegas with his own agenda. Nicky's a crazed hit man who specializes in low-level shakedowns to make a buck. He gets his first taste of real power in Vegas and it is his undoing.

Ace takes up with Ginger McKenna (Sharon Stone), a slick hooker who remains forever under the thumb of a two-bit pimp named Lester (James Woods). Ace is intrigued by her beauty, and with nary a thought, marries her after a brief, whirlwind courtship.

For a savvy man, Ace turns up dumb when it comes to Ginger. Shortly after they wed, he deposits $2 million in a safe deposit box, gets the account in her name alone and has only one key made! It is to be his emergency money in case things ever go wrong.

Ginger, meanwhile, has been giving Lester tens of thousands of dollars and still sees him. Even after Ace discovers her deception, he still remains married to her and he does nothing about securing the safe deposit box. Lester gets beat up, of course, but is allowed to live.

As Ace's relationship with Ginger ends, so does his alliance with Nicky, who has double crossed the mob bosses.

The score is settled in a climactic mass murder scene, played out to the the Animals' "Roung Sun." (Anyone remember "The Godfather"?)

Scorsese has a terrific soundtrack throughout "Casino." The only problem is that the music takes over. The plot is so unmvolving that you easily begin listening to the great songs — Stones, Cream, early rhythm and blues and top 40 from the '70s — that you ignore what's happening on the screen.

The non-stop voiceovers by De Niro and Pesci compete for sound space as well. It all makes for a fast-paced film, which still feels longer than its three-plus hours.

Pesci certainly keeps up the machine-gun rhythm with his demented Nicky, who is not much different from the role Pesci played in "GoodFellas." De Niro seems to be the center of the movie. He keeps the film, and everyone else, on an even keel, and he's just great — pink socks and all!

'Fiddler' a celebration of family, tradition

Musical will be on stage at Providence Performing Arts Center

By MARGO J. MOORE
Gazette Staff Writer

TAUNTON — Family life as experienced by Tevye the milkman in a small turn-of-the-century Russian village in "Fiddler on the Roof," bears many similarities to family life today.

"This show is about family," Rebecca Hoodwin, who plays Tevye's wife Golda, said in a recent phone interview from Richmond, Va.

Ms. Hoodwin, who will be appearing in "Fiddler on the Roof" at the Providence Performing Arts Center in Providence Dec. 5 through 10, said she believes the concerns of families have not changed much over the years.

The role of Golda is one Ms. Hoodwin is very comfortable with since she has played it for many years.

"I've had daughters younger than me and older," she said. While, she herself is not a mother she said one of her sources for the character of Golda is her own sister who has a family and is the same type of mothering, nurturing character as Golda.

Ms. Hoodwin said she draws on both a maternal feeling within herself and observations of her sister to give depth to Golde's character.

Set at the turn of the century in the Russian village of Anatevka, "Fiddler on the Roof" focuses on the troubles facing a poor milkman, Tevya, played by Theodore Bikel, who is struggling to provide for his wife and five unmarried daughters.

The musical opens with the rich lyrics and tones of "Tradition" a song that delineates the station of each person in the village and his or her place in life.

The Mama must mend, tend, fix, sweep, care for those in her family, the song tells us and teach her daughters to carry on the same tradition.

It is the unfolding nature of Golda's role that Ms. Hoodwin said makes it such a challenging and demanding part to play each night.

Tevye is an example of how the Jewish people living in Anatevka deal with persecution from the anti-semitic imperial Russian rulers and how they face up to the changes in society which threaten their religious way of life.

Golda and Tevye watch, almost helplessly, as their three older daughters flout convention and take husbands of their own choosing not ones picked out for them by Yente the Matchmaker.

Using humor and wit, Tevye carries on conversations between himself and God that allows the audience to share in his minute examination of large and small problems facing ordinary people and how to keep one's balance in a rapidly changing world. Some of the answers to the questions Tevye raises are in such songs as "Matchmaker, Matchmaker," "If I Were a Rich Man," and the hauntingly beautiful "Sunrise, Sunset."

It is these problems of love, marriage, finance, and family tradition that Ms. Hoodwin believes have not changed, are still with us today and are one of the main reasons for "Fiddler on the Roof's" enduring popularity.

Everyone, she noted, has at one time or another, had to deal with family. Family can be divisive or it can be a source of strength. For Tevye and Golde their family and their love for each other is the tie that binds, the touchstone of stability in a changing world.

"Fiddler on the Roof" opened on Broadway in 1964 and had an initial, record-breaking run of 3,200 performances. It captured Tony Awards for Librettist Joseph Stein as Best Author, the team of Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick as Best Composer and Lyricist and Jerome Robbins for Best Direction and Choreography. When the show returned to Broadway 25 years later it won the 1991 Tony Award for Best Revival.

"Fiddler on the Roof" will be at the Performing Arts Center for eight shows Dec. 5 through 10. For a complete schedule and ticket prices, call (401) 421-ARTS.

DO YOU LOVE ME: Theodore Bikel as Tevye and Rebecca Hoodwin as Golde sing together in a scene from "Fiddle on the Roof" coming to the Providence Performing Arts Center Dec. 5 through 10.

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